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The Concept of Integration

Staffan Zetterholm

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Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| The Concept of Integration | 5 |
| Introduction | 5 |
| Integration as Common Institutions | 5 |
| Interaction as Bound by Rules | 7 |
| The Definition of an Interaction Field | 8 |
| Formal Institutions Versus Informal Institutions | 8 |
| Institutions and Strategies | 10 |
| Stability and Change of Institutions | 15 |
| Institutional Conflict | 18 |
| Conceptual Dimensions of 'Integration' | 19 |
| Integration as policy | 19 |
| Integration as political ideology | 21 |
| Integration as process | 22 |
| Integration as social learning | 24 |
| References | 26 |

The Concept of Integration

Introduction

The concept of integration is being attached to very many different social phenomena and processes. One may point to the common habit of delimiting it in relation to different societal sectors: one might talk about economic, political, social, and cultural integration. But one might also use other distinctions such as institutional, normative, and structural integration¹.

As a very preliminary delimitation of 'integration' within the social sciences² one could use a traditional dictionary definition: 'to amalgamate or unite parts so that they become a new whole'. Earlier autonomous units are linked to each other, e.g. new relations are established between them. And furthermore a new unit - a new system - is created or emerges, having the other units as subsystems. In some contexts, integration implies that the earlier independent units or subsystems do not disappear or are dissolved. For example, within anthropology and sociology integration is often contrasted to 'assimilation', when used in relation to the incorporation of ethnic groups in a society. In this context assimilation denotes the end of the ethnic group as a cultural unit with its own identity. In other contexts, as for example in the case of political integration, there seems to be no logical need to exclude an end-result of the integration processes in the form of a unitary state, but in 'practice' and within the perspective of European integration, the same feature remains: the earlier political units do not disappear or are dissolved. But, anyhow, starting from this very vague and general delimitation there seems to be a risk that the term 'integration' will 'disintegrate' as it is applied to very different social phenomena and different scientific contexts.

Integration as Common Institutions

In spite of the diversity of usages of the concept of integration, it may be possible to delimit some aspects which seem to be general and also of importance in understanding the diversity of usage. Let us start with a distinction between integration and interdependence. Integration means something more than just a certain level of interactions or

¹ Within analyses of social integration three aspects or dimension are often singled out: Personal, Relational and Structural integration.

² We do not wish to include other scientific areas such as mathematics or technical sciences, where the concept of 'integration' also is used.

transactions. And this 'more' can be expressed in terms of some common framework or common institutions. Thus, in our terminology raising trade levels or levels of direct investments do not in themselves mean a higher level of integration. Political integration includes the establishment of common political institutions, economic integration the establishment of common economic institutions, etc. By common political institutions we mean both formal, organized institutions such as a parliament or a governmental arrangement - on European level, the European Parliament or the Council of Ministers - and the evolvement of informal routines and expectations such as the regular exchange of information between the foreign offices of the capitals of western Europe before the launch of larger policy initiatives. Examples of common economic institutions may be a European patent office, a customs union, the EU internal market, but also more informal rules and patterned cooperation between European firms on the global market. The differentiation between political, economic, or social institutions does not imply that there are no links between the sectors³.

It must also be stressed that the concept of 'common institutional arrangements' does not necessarily mean that the common framework exhausts the regulation of an interaction field. Common institutions may cover some aspects of the field, while subunit rule-sets still are active on the national or lower level. The interplay between common institutions and sub-unit institutions may take different forms, e.g. the common framework may give general guide-lines to be filled out in detail by the sub-units - it comes naturally here to associate to the ongoing debate about 'subsidiarity' within the European union - or it may define rules for the extension and validity of the rules of the sub-units, as, for example, the EU rule of 'reciprocal recognition' of national product standard testing procedures.

From the perspective of European integration, the concept of integration is related to the ongoing political project of integrating the economic and political systems of a number of west European countries. The primary instruments used in this political project is common decision-making structures (the main parts being the European Council, the Council of Ministers, The European Commission, The European Parliament, and the European Court of Justice, etc.) producing common rules, regulating the behaviour of states, firms, organizations and individuals⁴. So, the definition of integration in terms of common institutions seems to be a good starting point: we have different sets of institutions relating to different action fields, and these have as their aim to regulate, organize and coordinate behaviour within their respective action field as defined by the institutional set-up.

Two things might be gained by explicitly relating the concept of integration to the concept of institutions. It is possible to make use of the extensive scientific debate on what institutions mean and in what relation they stand to actors and to societal structure and to social change. And, secondly, it is possible to highlight or make clear the relation between

³ Political actions have, of course, often the economic sector as their target, and strategies within the economic field may be implemented with the purpose of influencing political decisions or changing political power relations.

⁴ Summarized in the term of *acquis communautaire*.

the different aspects of integration, which are common within theories of integration, namely (formal) institutions, attitudes, and processes.

In order to avoid a too static picture, it is important to underline the dynamic dimension of integration: institutions change, both as a result of efforts by political and economic actors to change the rules, but also as a result of changes in different societal sectors. For example: changes in technology, or in science, will lead to changes in economic production and the institutional framework will be adapted to, or express, the new 'situation'. Raising trade levels will lead to demands for a new, common trade regime. Changes in the power relations between social groups, emanating from structural changes in the society, such as higher levels of literacy and mobility, will put existing institutions under pressure and induce institutional change.

Interaction as Bound by Rules

There is a plethora of definitions of the concept of institution. According to some one may make a distinction between two basic foci of interest in relation to the analysis of institutions: a sociological approach emphasizing the "social and cognitive features of institutions"⁵, and a rational-choice approach focussing upon institutions as constraints on rational action. In spite of these differences and in spite of the existing view that "incommensurable definitions means that despite similarities in labelling, these approaches - all called institutionalist - have little in common"⁶, we find it necessary to include elements from these different approaches in our discussion of integration. To us there is no way of excluding any of the three concepts being central in the understanding of institutions: *rules, common understanding (of a situation), and social relations expressed in (regular) interaction patterns*. In a way, a simple way of approaching the place of institutions in social life is to think of them as 'the rules of a social game'⁷, which again are reproduced by the actions of the participants. Different institutionalist approaches emphasize somewhat differently the dimensions of institutions. In some contexts, institutional frameworks may be seen as constraints on actions, where, in a sense, the rules are outside of the actors; in other contexts, institutions are ways of doing things, 'habits of the hearts' (Tocqueville) or 'habits of thought' (Veblen), and the rules expressed in the interaction patterns are thus 'internalized' in the actors⁸, and they may

⁵ Finnemore, 1996:326.

⁶ Ib. p. 326.

⁷ Such an expression is a variation of the definition given by North "...the rules of a game in a society" in relation to an institutionalist approach to economics (North, 1991:3). And in political science March & Olsen argue that "Political/ institutions have a repertoire of procedures, and they use rules to select among them" (March & Olsen, 1989:21-22).

⁸ Sometimes the distinction between a 'small' and a 'large' institutionalism is made.

even be said to constitute the actors⁹.

Institutions relate to the members of an interaction field in both these ways¹⁰.

The Definition of an Interaction Field

Included in 'the rules of the game', or even - it might be said - constituted by them is a definition of what kind of game the participants are involved in. Thus, one function of institutions is to define an action field, and to create a common understanding of what kind of activities which are pursued in that action field, what purpose they have, and what values which are being sought and what social relations the participants have.

Under the heading of rules one may summarize different kind of rules, therein included

- * membership rules (who is entitled to participate in the game),
- * role rules (what roles are accessible or legitimate to which participants),
- * action rules (what actions, or set of actions, are permitted, prescribed or prohibited)
- * sanction rules (what sanctions by whom are to follow in relation to the rulegoverned behaviour)¹¹.
- * constitutional rules (what procedures to use to change the rules) and so on.

This is only one way of classifying the rules of a interaction field¹². Others may be more relevant in relation to the analysis of specific types of institutions¹³. The point to be made here is only that an action field is structured through an institution (or a set of institutions) and that the institution creates 'meaning' by defining the type or purpose of the interaction and creates 'order' by linking role-sets, action-sets, and sanction-sets, including incentives, and thereby establishes common expectations of what will probably happen in a certain situation, i.e. a certain predictability. The definition of the interaction field will also define the interests and the goals of the participants.

⁹ "Participation in the growing network of international organizations is culturally necessary and 'appropriate' in James March and Johan Olsen's sense of the term. Further, participation in international organizations constructs or constitutes what states want or, in the case of European Union participation, what they are" (Finnemore, 1996:338).

¹⁰ Cf. p.7 below.

¹¹ In spite of the everyday connotation of sanction as negative sanctions, we want to stress that sanction rules here may include rewards (positive sanctions) in case of rule-fulfilment as well as punishments (negative sanctions) in case of rule breaches.

¹² "By 'rules' we mean the routines, procedures, conventions, roles, strategies, organizational forms, and technologies around which political activity is constructed. We also mean the beliefs, paradigms, codes, cultures, and knowledge that surround, support, elaborate, and contradict those roles and routines." (March & Olsen, 1989:22).

¹³ Cf. Bogason, 1994: 92.

Formal Institutions Versus Informal Institutions

Formal institutions are rule-sets, which are explicitly formulated, often in a written form, as in legal regulations, in constitutions, or in organizational charts. Informal institutions are rules or rule-sets which are effective in regulating interactions (or transactions) but which are not explicitly formulated. The informal rules thus evolves as traditions for handling things in a certain way¹⁴, as for example in work norms or norms of cooperation, but also manners and social conventions. A specific action field is often regulated by a combination of formal and informal rules, where the informal rules supplement and fill in the action space created by the formal rules, or - to reverse the sequence - the informal rules may be seen as more general cultural norms, which are reflected in the formal framework.

From what has been said so far it may be concluded that **organizations**, which coordinate and regulate the actions and interactions of the members of the organization, can be seen as a specific form of institution. An organization is a formally regulated action field, which has been established in order to reach some (common) task, goal, or purpose¹⁵. The coordination of interaction within an organization takes place through the two layers of formal and informal rule-sets, which relate to each other in a more or less consistent manner. The informal rules of an organization might be described as the organizational culture, or as informal structure, expressed e.g. as informal 'networks'.

For some analytical purposes - and particularly so where organizations are seen as actors - it is of value to make a distinction between institutions and organizations¹⁶, and look at the institutional framework of the organizations as constraints and organizations as "major agents of institutional change"¹⁷. In a way, the distinction can be seen as a level-of-analysis distinction, parallel to the distinction between the organization as actor and as system. From another point of view, the question whether institutions can be conceptualized as actors must be answered by reference to their institutional coherence and autonomy. "A claim of coherence is necessary if we wish to treat institutions as decision-makers"¹⁸.

The existence and importance of informal institutions, which, though informal, create order and reduce uncertainty, is a very fundamental assumption in explanations of behaviour regularities, recurring patterns of interactions, and the stability of social life such as routines and traditions.

Institutions, in this very general meaning, is founded on the mental capacities of human beings, who can be described as having an intellectual capacity - and the need - to create a model of the structure of an action field, of different roles and rules and

¹⁴ In their taxonomy of institutions, relating to innovation systems, Edquist & Johnson (forthcoming) make a parallel distinction between designed and self-grown institutions.

¹⁵ Cf discussion in Halkier, 1996:16-20.

¹⁶ Cf. North, 1991:5

¹⁷ North, 1991:5.

¹⁸ March & Olsen, 1989:17.

borders, and who also have the capacity to collectively develop that model, i.e. to change it, to make it more realistic, perhaps to make it more differentiated and complex, through the interplay with other people - checking out where different perceptions of the (rules of) the action field seem to be present and solving the discrepancies between the different models, either through adaptation of one's own model or through different kinds of coherence-creating 'negotiations' or as an extreme case, through exclusion of the deviant actor groups from the action field.

The common features of such interaction models include at the minimum a definition of the action field, of its borders, and such restrictions on individual behaviour as to allow relatively stable expectations of what is going to happen in the sense that the actions of the participants are understandable though perhaps disagreeable. This does not imply either that there is or must be total agreement as to the content of roles and rules and borders involved in the action field (the game), or that behaviour will, or must be, entirely prescribed by the action rules of the institution. By using the analogy of (common sense) models of an action field, though developed jointly and/or transmitted to new participants, we want to emphasize that there always seem to be some leeway for individual interpretation and that the institutional arrangements only create a framework for the strategies of the actors.

The character and degree of convergence and consistency between the action field models of the participants is an important and complex research area. Some action fields demand a higher level of model convergence, because of specific functional requirements, both regarding the tasks of the action field and the necessity for specific, in detail prescribed, actions. This would normally be the case for an organization with a high level of division of labour, of specialization and complex coordination chains. But demands for more strict coordination of behaviour - and thus for more model homogeneity - may also be found for reasons of political, religious and social control, thus perpetuating a specific structure of power and authority; breaches of ritual and other social rules is heavily sanctioned as a way of reinforcing the institutional arrangements and the concomitant incentive and resource distribution bias.

Institutions and Strategies

In most circumstances, even including situations with strict action prescriptions, it seems reasonable and useful to make a distinction between institutions and strategies. Even if an institution contains rules that define the acceptable or legitimate action-set, this action-set will in most cases include a number of actions - the level of specificity¹⁹ will be less than total - and thus there will be room within the institution for strategic deliberations by the actors. "Rules and their applicability to particular situations are often ambiguous... Situations can be defined in different ways that call forth different rules. Rules are

¹⁹

One of the three concepts used by Robert O. Keohane to describe international institutions. The other two are Commonality - the extent to which all participants share the same institution - and Autonomy - the power of the participants to change themselves the rules of the game. Cf. Keohane, 1989:4-5.

constructed by a process that sometimes encourages ambiguity”²⁰. Furthermore, an actor may consciously decide to break a rule even if it incurs him internal or external costs. And, finally, he may consciously ‘choose’ to reinterpret the content of a rule and in that way to change it: informal institutions are upheld by the fact that people continue to follow them. If they introduce new elements in the interaction pattern, this may eventually change the pattern as other participants reinterpret the rule-set and change their behaviour accordingly. So, in the case of informal institutions, where there are no specific ‘*institution guardians*’ with the power to sanction breaches of action rules and/or violations of rule changing procedures, the stability of the institution as an organizing device for an action field is only dependent upon the (conscious or unconscious) acceptance of the institutional arrangements by the participants of the action field, and this acceptance is never unconditional. If conditions change then interaction may change. Some changes in the interactional pattern may be contained within the existing institution but some may transgress the institutional framework and constitute an institutional change.

By introducing the concept of ‘strategy’ we have, in a sense, focussed upon rational action in a setting of rule-bound behaviour. There is a long-standing scholarly discussion about how to explain the existence of rule-bound behaviour. The reason for following a certain rule may be expressed either in terms of rationality - the rulebound behaviour has long-term beneficial effects, even if it to the individual actor in the short run has clear disadvantages - or in terms of needs to follow the rule irrespective of the specific outcome, and even if new and apparently better options become available. In this perspective “social norms are not future-oriented”²¹. In many situations it would seem that both types of motivational factors are active. “One eclectic view is that some actions are rational, others are norm-guided. A more general and more adequate formulation would be that actions typically are influenced both by rationality and by norms”²². Rationality may enter when there is a choice between inconsistent or ambiguous rules, or it may enter when the rules do not prescribe a specific action but rather create an opportunity-set, within which the actors may choose the action leading to the best outcome. As we already have discussed above, institutions do not preclude actors from having strategies, but these must be included in the deliberations about constraints and opportunities. Still, it is not a solution to disregard rules and norms as influencing behaviour directly and outside of rational calculation. “Unless rules were considered important and were taken seriously and followed, it would make no sense to manipulate them for personal benefit. If many people did not believe that rules were legitimate and compelling, how could anyone use these rules for personal advantage?”²³.

²⁰ March & Olsen, 1989:24.

²¹ Elster, 1989:99.

²² Elster, 1989:102.

²³ R. Edgerton, *Rules, Exceptions and the Social order*, University of California Press, 1985:3, as quoted in Elster, 1989:103.

Having introduced the distinction between institutions and strategies and the possibility of breaking the rules it is now possible for us to single out three aspects of institutions as rule-bound interaction, the mixing of which in the debate may create problems of understanding and contribute to the impression of the concept as being imprecise.

1) The first aspect is *the introduction of rules*. The rules may be formal and explicit, as presented above, or they may be informal and expressed through actions. But the point to be made is that new rules may be introduced. This may happen either through political decisions or through other authorities. They may also be introduced through changes in the behaviour of the participants of the action field, when a new rule may be implied as introduced by some actor or group of actors by their change of behaviour (which may also be verbally explicated). In order to avoid misunderstanding we say that a rule exists when it has been introduced as a rule binding the whole action field, i.e. when somebody demands that the rule shall be valid for the action field, or when there emanates a new interaction pattern in the field, which 'demands' or implies a change of behaviour by the other members of the field. Thus, we don't want to exclude rule-introduction 'behind the backs of the actors'.

2) The second aspect is *the acceptance by the members of the action field of the rule as binding for the interaction*. This is the aspect of the legitimacy of the institution. In the case of formal institutions the analytical distinction between the existence of the rule-set and its acceptance by the actors seems rather easy to handle. But in the case of informal institutions it may seem more difficult to argue for the relevance of this distinction. If there is no stable pattern of interaction - the 'evidence' of a common informal institution - one could argue that there is no common institution but instead several institutions regulating different action subfields, or that we are in a position of rapid institutional change in a period preceding the establishment of a new common institution and the creation of common expectations as to rules and roles and borders of the action-field. Still, by introducing the possibility of non-legitimacy of common informal institutions in a certain sub-group of the actors of the action field, we may make thinking about the dynamics of institutional change easier by not postulating total identity between the institution and its acceptance. It becomes easier to reflect upon tensions and conflicts over the content of common institutions.

3) The third aspect is *interaction in accordance with the rules*. Interaction as rule-bound behaviour also implies that institutions are expressed through practices. It is through the interactions that the institution is reproduced.

The behavioural dimension of an institution is necessary in order to single out the processes generated under a common institutional rule-set. As already mentioned, institutions do not always prescribe a specific behaviour in a specific situation. There is always room for maneuvering and the interplay between different strategies may lead to outcomes, which are wanted by no one and which come as a surprise to everybody. These are the well-known phenomena in social life summarized as *the unintended consequences*

of social action²⁴. As a variation of this theme, one may see the interplay between the formal rules of an organisation and the informal rules of the members of the organization, leading to a result far from the (official) goals of the organization.

4) One might add other aspects of an institution: for example *its extension*. We have earlier talked about a common institution as defining the interaction field or the kind of social game to be and the legitimate values to be implemented. Thus, institutions create meaning for the participants²⁵. The institutional arrangement may be defined in terms of specific functions and tasks, it may be restricted to a certain group or category of actors, it may even include explicit rules for excluding certain groups of actors from entering the action field, or for formulating entrance criteria for new-comers, etc.

Modern life with its highly developed division of labour and specialization, is often described in terms of the individual being part of many different social contexts - social and professional 'games' - with different rationales, different functions, different memberships, different degrees of explicit boundedness. Of course, a minimal criterion of an interaction field, is that there is some sort of interaction between the members, but also some minimal perception of constituting an interaction field. This perception is of course related to the 'model' of the social context, to which we have referred earlier (p. 3). The interaction field could be defined very much in terms of its specific functions and be of an ad hoc-character, as for a team of engineers put together as a network in order to solve a specific technical problem. It may be very task oriented but of a more permanent character, as in a research and development branch of a commercial firm. But one may also define an interaction field, where the level of interaction perhaps is more potential than real, or maybe with a better expression, more indirect than direct and interpersonal, but where there is a common definition of belonging together, of having a common identity. The example which immediately comes to one's mind is the 'nation'. In the classical formulation of Benedict Andersen the nation is an "imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign"²⁶. It is referred to as imagined, because it is not based upon an actual experience that the members share some common characteristics and some common identity. "Even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them"²⁷. But these characteristics - for example a common culture and a common history - are imagined as real and existing. Furthermore, the nation is limited, i.e. the boundaries of the interaction

²⁴ Cf. for example, Raymond Boudon, *The Unintended Consequences of Social Action*, The Macmillan Press, London, 1982.

²⁵ "Politics creates, confirms, or modifies interpretations of life. Through politics, individuals develop their identities, their communities, and the public good. Historically, theories of political institutions portrayed political decision making primarily as a process for developing a sense of purpose, direction and, belonging" (March & Olsen, 1989:48). An analogue argument could, of course, be extended to economic or social institutions.

²⁶ Andersen, 1991:6.

²⁷ Andersen, 1991:6.

field, is (imagined to be) fairly well defined. As a political community it is conceived as consisting of individuals who are equal, i.e. of citizens with equal rights and duties, quite irrespective of real inequalities of political opportunities and influence. Thus, the nation constitutes an interaction field in the sense that it is structured by common institutions, defining common goals and meanings, even in the case when there are no formal institutional arrangements like a state.

There is no difficulty in multiplying examples of different types of interaction fields with the use of dimensions such as single-purpose - multi-purpose interaction, degree of organizational (formal) structure, degree of permanence, degree of specificity, degree of commonality, or degree of rule softness-hardness²⁸. The notions of 'interaction field' and of 'institution', in spite of being vague, and with some difficulties in the empirical assessment of where the borders of an interaction field are situated²⁹, point to the element of rule-bound behaviour.

Two reflections seem pertinent here:

- 1) Different rule-sets regulate different social contexts. An individual switching from one context to another has normally the capacity to identify the change in context and to identify and use the relevant rule-set in his dealings with the other players of that particular 'social game'. Thus, difficulties in delimiting institutions and interaction fields by the analyst may be more a question of ignorance and lack of learning (through observation or participation) in specific social contexts than an inherent fuzziness of the concept.
- 2) The question if and how different institutional arrangements refer to each other becomes central here. It seems evident that if the different institutions of a society have some common characteristics, if the rules - action-rules, procedure-change-rules and sanction-rules etc. - of different societal institutions can be said to resemble each other, to express common elements or to be specific and context-bound formulations of more general rules or norms, then the whole collective construction of institutions for different interaction fields seem somewhat less prohibitive as a social learning process. If one accepts the idea of higher level norms and rules there will be certain restrictions on what kind of rules in a specific interaction fields which will be probable and acceptable. Among the participants of a new interaction field there will already exist common expectations as to what rules to accept and what rules to expect. This will of course make the learning and adaptation to a new situation much easier, one might even - at least hypothetically - conceive of a process when a group of actors who have not been acting together before, but having the same general norms, can - without interaction and without checking up with each other - deduce a set of 'reasonable' rules for a common institution and be fairly confident that their different institutional

²⁸ The harder a rule, the more binding or non-optional.

²⁹ In this they, seem parallel to other social science concepts like 'system' and 'network', handy for thought but with uncertain empirical borders.

arrangements will resemble each other. The time and energy needed to settle misunderstandings and conflicts will in that case be drastically reduced.

Whether, or to what extent, such more general norms³⁰ (and values) in the form of a societal culture exist is a highly contested issue. Depending upon the interests of the researcher the complexity³¹ of cultural phenomena may allow you to focus upon the general and common aspects of a culture or on the diversity of cultural expressions. From the perspective presented here the question is not so much whether there are any general norms, which create a framework for interpreting rule-sets and restrain the set of acceptable or preferable rules of different institutional arrangements, but rather whether we should talk about transnational sectoral or professional cultures instead of national or societal cultures. This is related to the question of the organization and control of the socializing and learning processes of modern societies. Through those - and through interaction experience - different actor groups generate the collective 'models' which are the basis of their common expectations and rule-development.

Stability and Change of Institutions

Implicit in the concept of 'institution' is stability, or recurring patterns of actions. "Continuously changing institutions are, after, all, a contradiction in terms"³². And institutional change, if reflected upon at all, is often thought of as long-term and slow. This is particularly so in the case of macro-societal institutions, like the family or basic authority rules in a society.

But institutions do change, new institutions are introduced and come to regulate interactions within a field - a new constitution may restructure political life, or new basic economic institutions will regulate new economic transactions (as we see it in transition economies), new transnational cooperation patterns are developing within the framework of all European institutions, etc. This seems unavoidable, if a social, economic or political system is to adapt to, for example, changes in technology, demography, and in the international environment. Thus, institutions must be approached both from the perspective of stability and from the perspective of change. Let us first discuss some mechanisms contributing to the stability of institutions.

³⁰ One of the most famous and most often cited analyses of broad national cultural norms is Gert Hofstede's *Cultures and organizations. Software of the mind*, 1991. He deduces four general cultural dimensions from his analysis of the survey responses of IBM employees in a series of countries: power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance.

³¹ Cf. *Cultural Complexity* by Ulf Hannerz, in which the emphasis is on the diversity of cultural phenomena, related to different societal sectors, and to the diversity of local traditions.

³² Edquist & Johnson, (forthcoming) p. 22.

Institutional stability

If institutions are described as rule-sets defining a certain action-field or what has been called a 'social game' it is fairly easy to imagine different mechanisms, which may contribute to the maintenance of the institution. We have already mentioned the inclusion of sanction-rules - which define what kind of sanctions which may be implemented by whom to actors who break the rules - and we have also introduced the term of 'institution guardians', who act in order to secure the continuation of the institution. The guardians can be formal organizations, which have the specific responsibility to investigate and intervene where formal or legal rules have been broken, one may give the example of the European Commission as the 'Guardian of the Treaties', but, of course, police and courts of justice are just as good, trivial examples from the national arena, having the responsibility of rule-enforcement. But within the context of informal institutions - and even for many formal institutions - the identification of the institution guardians is somewhat less self-evident. Two main groups of mechanisms might be singled out, and summarized in the terms of 'social control' and 'internalization of social or cultural norms'. The idea of 'social control' points to existence of many different forms of action patterns, utilized by the members of a particular action field, in order to convince potentially recalcitrant participants in a social game that it will be to their advantage to follow the rules and not to break them. The resources used may also be vastly different (from threats of withdrawal of economic or social opportunities, to threats of psychological deprivation such as withdrawal of security, love or other emotional links) depending upon what kind of institutionally structured action field we focus upon and what kind of participant relations which characterize that field. 'Internalization' suggests mechanisms through which the participant actor come to accept the institutional rule-sets as natural, suitable or given, to the extent that he has no internal incentive to try to change the rules or strongly feel tempted to break them. The reasons for the internalization of social rules can be sought both within a theoretical framework of social and psychological needs - our social character - which make the acceptance of collective norms a part of the human condition, and within a theoretical framework of utilitarian deliberation, where the actors realize the necessity to create some interaction structure and stay by the rules, in order to avoid the costs of non-coordination, be they described as anarchy, as prohibitive uncertainty or as high transaction costs. The rationality of institutions, in terms of over-all cost reduction, seems to be a rather prominent theme within institutionalist approaches in political science and - of course - in economics, even if institutions are seen as 'biased', i.e. distributing gains and costs in an unequal manner between the participating groups of actors. It is not necessary, nor possible, to expand here the discussion of different traditions for explaining rule-bound behaviour, but the question raised is relevant to the problem which is crucial to our investigation of institutional conflict and institutional change, or rephrased, of institutional stability: Why stick to a specific institutional arrangement? Or, what are the motivating force to oppose or resist the introduction of new institutional arrangements, such as all-European political and economic institutions?

Some different answers to the question of why one sticks to an institution may be singled out as examples:

- One might value the participation in the action field, defined by a specific institution, in terms of self-identification and self-realization. In a new institutional context your identity may be changed and in a direction yet unknown.
- One might also value the continued existence of the institution, because it creates meaningfulness and cognitive order, and in that way reduces anxiety. A new institutional set-up may demand comprehensive redefinition of the action field and may also introduce uncertainty and cognitive disorder.
- One might value the power position allocated by the existing institution. Institutional change may reshuffle the distribution of economic or political power resources.
- One might value the output of the action field, the gains to be realized through the coordination of action, which might be jeopardized by a new institutional set-up, both through the reshuffling of the distribution of material gains and through the disruption of a smoothly running of an ongoing system and, thus, leading to raising transaction costs. Institutional change takes time to be implemented, new tensions may be introduced quite apart from the costs incurred by the introduction of new routines and new standards.

Institutional change

In spite of the traditional emphasis on the stability of institutions, it is as important to include the perspective of institutional change. This may be conceptualized as the introduction of a new institutional set-up as an adaptation to a new situation: tensions build up as a result of the institutional 'sclerosis'³³, i.e. mal-functioning of the earlier institutional set-up, which eventually is substituted by a more appropriate one. Different sectors of a society develop in different ways or at different speeds. The inter-connections between the spheres mean that the rigidity of one sphere comes to constitute an obstacle to further developments in other sectors. One classic example of this way of reasoning is the Marxist conceptual differentiation between the productive forces and the production relations of a society. But the basic argument can be found in modern theories of economic growth. Chris Freeman distinguishes between five societal subsystems, with each their relative autonomy and different patterns of institutional stability and change: the technological, the scientific, the economic, the political and the general cultural subsystem. Economic growth will depend upon the institutional fit between these. "Positive congruence and interaction between them provides the most fertile soil for growth, while lack of congruence may prevent growth altogether, or slow it down"³⁴.

But institutional change may also be of a less dramatic character. Institutions may change through piece-meal engineering, where new rules and new roles are introduced

³³ 'Euro-sclerosis' was a common designation in the 1970's of the incapacity of the EC system to change in face of changing world economic relations.

³⁴ Freeman, 1995:ii.

into the set-up, without disrupting the rest of the rule-set. This way of developing institutions is based upon the assumption that it is possible to introduce new elements, which fit into or complement the existing rule-structure. The introduction of an 'ombudsman', which would fit nicely into an open, democratic political system, will create tensions and even disruptions in an oligarchic political institutional set-up. Changes in informal institutional rules may also create the flexibility needed for the new circumstances, without any changes in the formal rule-set. Changes in political party cooperation and alliance possibilities, which can be described as against the political traditions of a country, may be implemented to reduce political unrest or demand overload, without any change neither in the constitution nor in the internal formal rules of the parties.

Implicit in the idea of small-scale institutional adaptation is often a distinction between more basic or fundamental institutions and more restricted rule-sets³⁵, applied in a certain area. The latter are, in a sense, less important and more changeable, as long as the introduction of new rules does not conflict with the basic rules of a society. In this context, one might also draw attention to the possible existence of rules, which establishes procedures for the change of institutions, something which makes rule-change part of the ongoing interaction patterns: institutional change becomes part of institutional stability. The rule-making and rule-changing capacity of the political system is of course the prime example, but the existence of rule-changing rules are probably ubiquitous.

Institutional Conflict

It is important to stress that institutional change often is imbedded in conflicts about the what institutional arrangements to introduce (and perhaps also about the most appropriate procedures for deciding upon and implementing new rules.) We have already mentioned that the introduction of new institutions may take place as a result of a deliberate effort to establish a new institutional arrangement by purposive action as for example in negotiations leading to the decision and ratification of a new political constitution, or the establishment of a new organization, or the decisions on a political-economic project such as the regulations comprising an internal market. We have also said that new institutions may also - in the case of informal institutions - emanate as a result of the reciprocal adaptation of behaviour (and the corresponding understanding of the interaction field) after 'malfunctioning' of an old institution at least in the view of some of the actors of the interaction field, leading to initiatives to change interaction patterns.

Institutional conflict can take a variety of forms but will always consist of a rivalry about which rule-set that should be valid. In the case of non-formalized institutions, different groups may compete through their actions as to what institutional arrangement should regulate behaviour within the interaction field. The rivalry may also be expressed in different claims as to the definition of the interaction field or 'what kind of social game we are to play'. In the absence of direct communication and negotiation opportunities, the introduction of new rules and attempts to redefine the game will most

³⁵ 'Supportive institutions' in the terminology of Edquist & Johnson (forthcoming) p.15.

probably incur large costs, in the form of misunderstandings, confusion, disruption of routines and traditional ways of doing things, and furthermore, in the attempt by other participants in the interaction field to retaliate, and perhaps to try to exclude the 'institution revisionists' from the interaction field. The case of interaction without any communication and the transfer of intentions and the will to change rules may seem far-fetched. Still, the establishment of an international system of states based upon the concept of state sovereignty and the principle of legal equality of all states, seems to be an example where rules and common understanding were developed to a large extent as a result of direct political or military interaction with direct communication playing a minor role³⁶.

In the case of formalized institutions the conflict may take the form of a) direct (political or social) opposition to the institutional arrangements, i.e. an effort to change the formal rule decisions, or b) indirect or informal opposition, where the leeway for individual strategies³⁷ to pursue the establishment or maintenance of an alternative rule-set is exploited. This could take the form of informal institutional structure among a sub-set of the participants, building informal roles, routines, standardized operations and pursuing values which are not part of the formal institution but doing so without entering into open conflict with the formal institutional arrangements and without risking sanctions from the 'institution guardians'.

Another conflict strategy in the case of institutional conflicts is to withdraw from the interaction field - to use the exit-option - and to try to build an institution of one's own and try to isolate it from the earlier interaction field. You might create an organization of your own with its own rules, e.g. a state, a church, a local community, a school, based upon other principles than the surrounding environment. Or, if there already exist alternative institutional arrangements for a certain interaction type in a society, the individual solution to the conflict will be to opt out of one social game and just join another. In a political context, you may for example 'vote with your feet', in economics you may change to another job in another firm, another producer, etc.

Thus, the form the institutional conflict will take, will be dependent upon whether there is - or may be established - *institutional pluralism*. Now, the characteristics of the interaction field, including whether the tasks or functions of the interaction field are dependent upon a high level of division of labour, of precise coordination between different actions in specific sequences, and so on, may make the existence of different rule-sets detrimental to the interaction goals, be they expressed in terms of a certain output or in terms of 'efficiency'. It is difficult to imagine a centralized bureaucratic organization accepting different competing decision-making centers or competing lines-of-command. On the other hand, different organizations, using different institutional arrangements, may co-exist in a certain interaction field, if they are connected in an orderly or routinized way to each other through 'higher level' rules. Such higher-level rules may reduce the (risk for) conflict or intrusion of one organization by another by restricting the forms of contacts,

³⁶ Cf. Dunne 1995, *passim*.

³⁷ Cf. p. 5 above.

i.e. by regulating the competition between the organizations. Thus, by introducing common higher level rules, which establish the principle of non-intervention and autonomy for member-groups of the interaction-field, the stage is set for a combination for common, higher level, institutions, and different, lower level, institutions, a necessary structural element in order to handle institutional diversity in a modern society.

In many cases different member groups with different institutions do not have the option of autonomy or isolation in relation to other groups. They may be connected to each other as competitors for scarce resources, for control over the environment, for influence over higher level decisions, which will have an impact on them all, etc. In such cases, there is a possibility that conflicts over the common institutional framework will reemerge, as every institutional framework distributes opportunities and incentives in a way which may be contested.

Conceptual Dimensions of 'Integration'

Using the discussions and the distinctions made above, we may now elaborate on different dimensions of the concept of 'integration'. Let us therefore present four different aspects of the concept of integration, which may be the focus of interest and denote different concepts of integration:

Integration as policy

On the one hand, 'integration' denotes the establishment of common, in the sense of formal, legally binding, rules for a certain interaction area. Thus, integration is seen as a public policy with the intention to regulate the interaction of a certain interaction field.

The policy of linking together of earlier separate and different action fields within a common institutional set-up is of course based upon the idea that integration is advantageous compared to having different institutions covering only the interaction system of a restricted area such as one country. In relation to the ongoing European integration project there is a continuing political debate about the distribution of advantages and disadvantages as a result of the integration for the participating countries, regions, economic sectors, social groups, etc. In an integration process based upon the principle of voluntary acceptance, quite clearly the overall advantage of all the participating units, be it in terms of economic growth or political strength or security, must of course be presented as self-evident and guaranteed. Otherwise, voluntarily accepted integration would be impossible.

Perhaps we may be allowed to digress here and note that it is quite possible to elaborate an idea of 'integration as policy', which is not based upon the voluntary accept by the participating political units, but where the common institutions are established as legally binding rules by a hegemonic political power, which has the ambition and the capacity to legally enforce the institutional arrangements, in spite of opposition and resistance of the other. Examples of forced integration 'as policy' may be the

establishment of an empire or the establishment of a non-democratic political union, dominated by one country.

It is the aim of the integration policy, which is the focal point of this integration aspect and not whether the aim is realized or not or what kind of effects or impact that the policy has. This is a common way of using the integration-term as when we for example talk about the internal market programme as a 'new step' in European integration. It is the almost 300 common rules of the programme which we refer to, quite irrespective of whether these rules have the intermediate result of establishing free movement of goods, services, labour, and capital. Quite clearly, there is an assumption that legally binding rules are obeyed and that the common rule-set also will regulate the interactions of the area. But this of course in many cases an unfounded assumption. Integration in the sense of new and intended interaction patterns might be moderated or hampered by the two other dimensions of institutional arrangements, the attitudinal dimension and the behavioural or interaction dimension.

The first concerns the acceptance of the participants of the interaction field of the new rules. If there is an obstruction of these, the interaction will not be regulated as intended. Actors may continue to follow old routines instead of exploiting new opportunities given by the introduction of new rules, or they may try to avoid following the new rules, even if these prescribe a certain line of action, and so on. Fraud, sabotage, tax avoidance are all examples of intentional rule-breaking, implying a level of non-acceptance of rules³⁸, which highlight the distinction between integration as the introduction of new rules and integration as the acceptance of those common rules.

The second dimension of institutional failure, the behavioural or interactional dimension, focuses upon another reason for the gap between aims and outcome. The policy-makers, aiming at integrated interaction patterns, have as all policy-makers incomplete knowledge of what aggregate impact the introduction of the new rules will have. New action patterns emerge, unforeseen by them, and perhaps by everybody else, the complexity of coordination of large numbers of actions, together with the uncertainty of how actors will react - what line of action they will take - in a new situation, defies all calculi. The result will be 'the unintended consequences of social action'. Thus, integration aims may create disintegration as result, because of the policy-makers' limited control over the interaction field.

The distinction between integration as policy and integration as (change in) interaction patterns, is of course parallel to the traditional distinction between policy as output of a decision-making process, and policy as outcome, i.e. the changes implemented on a societal arena. It is commonplace to note 1) that results often differ from aims in political policy-making, and 2) that it is surprisingly common that policy-makers often show a very moderate or non-existing interest in finding out what specific impact a particular policy has had. Explanations for this reluctance could be founded in a logic of political leadership: the lack of interest by political decision-makers is due to their need to be able to present themselves as strong and efficient leaders, who have control over 'the

³⁸ We do not wish to enter a moral-philosophical discussion about whether an actor may accept rules as legitimate while omitting to obey them in a specific situation.

situation', and to whom every disclosure of policy failure or inefficiency means a weakening of their political position. A variation of this kind of political-logic-explanation focuses on the 'real' function of the political process to create an image of orderliness and control over societal developments more than a specific outcome in terms of distribution or redistribution of certain values³⁹.

Integration as political ideology

In the same way one could see the initiatives taken the last 40 years in relation to European integration, as a political project, or even as a political ideology⁴⁰, the function of which is to create a political concept which defines a new political and economic order and which points to the establishment of common institutions as a way to make sure that there exists a rational way of surmounting the present unsatisfactory situation - or even crisis if one prefers that term. This kind of comprehensive plan or strategy for a societal reconstruction - which in a way could be seen almost as comprehensive as the 'traditional' ideologies of liberalism or socialism⁴¹ - assures through the emphasis on common institutions that "choice /can be/... made intelligently,... that /it/ is sensitive to the concerns of relevant people, and..... that the political system is controlled by its leadership"⁴².

Integration as political ideology as based upon the idea that common institutions solve a lot of the problems facing modern European societies. In a way, coordination and cooperation through common institutions, both in the political and the economic spheres, become the central organising principles, which create a necessary positive dynamics, generating growth and trust for the whole integrated system. Thus, the ideology emphasizes (legal) rule integration as an instrument not only for dismantling barriers but positively for creating a harmonious social development, where equal opportunities will strengthen understanding, trust and cooperation. Fundamentally, it seems to be a version of societal model based upon a conception of consensus, i.e. mental distance and social conflicts tends to diminish as a result of the establishment of common institutions.

The ideology may seem to be founded on two presuppositions. One is that behind the diversity of nation-states and the political barriers between peoples, there is a certain level of commonness or unity between the peoples. Therefore peaceful cooperation and non-discrimination is possible and needed. The second presupposition is that interdependence through technological and communicational developments has grown to

³⁹ Cf. March & Olsen, 1989:chapter 3.

⁴⁰ It is quite illuminating that in M.A. Riff (ed.) 'Dictionary of Modern political ideologies', pp. 86-89 there is a short chapter on European integration, written by Peter Ludlow.

⁴¹ Integration as an ideology can be seen both as a general or global ideology, emphasizing the need for global institutions, and as a regional ideology, emphasizing only regional - in our case European - common institutions. In the latter case it is of course less comprehensive than ideologies with universal aspirations such as liberalism or socialism.

⁴² March & Olsen, 1989:50.

the extent that only common institutions can minimize the ensuing potential for conflict and reap the economic, social and political benefits of large-scale cooperative efforts.

Within these broad ideological principles very many different, more specific, plans for common institutional arrangements, can be - and have been - proposed. The ongoing political debates on federalism, confederalism, supernationalism and intergovernmentalism, economic and monetary union, can all be seen as expressing different blueprints for European integration based upon the broad political ideology of European integration.

Integration as process

The third aspect of institutions, mentioned above, is the interactional dimension. Common institutions regulate interactions. New institutional rules, introduced by integrationist policies, may change the interaction patterns in ways, which can be summarized in terms of integration. If people act according to common rules they are integrated, and, in a certain sense, they are integrated by the common institutional arrangements. People are integrated socially, if they define the social situation in the same way and if they follow the same rules in the same way. Political integration means that people accept and act in accordance with common political institutions, in the same way as 'economic integration' stands for activities regulated by common economic institutions.

On the other hand, there is no immediate or automatic correspondence between the introduction of common legal rules for a certain interaction field and the ensuing interaction patterns. As we have argued above, there are different mechanisms in relation rule-based behaviour, which make it natural to assume a less than total fit between the formal definition and rules and the interactions.

- Formal rules may permit behaviour rather than prescribe it. It is not certain that the opportunities created by the new rules will be exploited by the participants of the 'field' in question. For example, the opportunity to compete on equal terms on a market, may not be enough incentive for a firm to enter the market. In many cases, the formal opportunity must be supplemented by economic support incentives, if action patterns are going to change.
- Formal rules may be vague as to what they prescribe or as to when, i.e. in what type of situation, they apply. This feature of rules - unavoidable if the application of a general rule is linked to some complex characteristics of the situation - opens up for different interpretations of what the legitimate behaviour should be and, thus, for different actions leading to an interaction field with misunderstandings, lack of coordination and 'inefficiency'.
- Actors may try to avoid acting in accordance with the new common rules and try to stick to their old ways of doing things. They may dislike the new common institutional arrangements, and, for political reasons, try to oppose them with the aim to change them either in a formal way by forcing the decision-makers to adapt the rules to the existing practices, or in informal way by establishing or maintaining practices which

make the rules obsolete.

- Actors may be ignorant of the new common, legal rules. If the capacity of the common institution to sanction is limited, this might create a situation where different and inconsistent rules apply to the same social game for quite a long time. The interaction field is less integrated or not integrated at all.

All in all, one might easily envisage a situation, where there is a certain level of inconsistency as to what rules apply, what importance to attach to the different rules, and what reasonable or legitimate actions which follow from the rules. A certain 'slack' is natural and unavoidable, if one wants to preserve flexibility and be able to adapt to new situations and to changes in the environment. Another reason for slack, the potential for strategic exploitation of rule ambiguity by individual actors, is also unavoidable in our civilization. On the other hand, and to repeat, common institutions fulfill certain functions, which could be seen as common goods to all of the participants, they create order and reduce uncertainty, they reduce negotiation and adaptation costs through the establishment of known procedures and routines, they make coordination and the implementation of common, complex tasks possible, etc. Thus, there seem to be strong forces also working in the direction of growing correspondence between the rules of a common institution and the acceptance of them expressed in behaviour patterns. In many, but not all, circumstances we would expect over time a growing acceptance of a common institution, and adaptation of actor behaviour to the formal rules - and the more so the more comprehensive and efficient their regulation of the interaction field seems to be. The reasons for this assumption is the 'irrationality' or costliness of not using the advantages of participating in the social game, when the chances of changing the 'rules of the game' are negligible, and the common interests of all participants of participating in an interaction field characterized by order instead of chaos. Integration may thus seem as a process over time, with a growing acceptance of the institutional set-up and a growing definition of actor interests and strategies in accordance with its definition of the interaction field⁴³. One may here draw attention to a parallel between this argument and the idea of rational norms, in the sense that the establishment of some norms seem less costly than uncertainty and chaos. But our argument does not imply that specific institutional set-ups are rational or optimal. They are much more the products of historical development and of different power constellations.

It is important to underline that all the time there is in the interaction field a tension between integrating and disintegrating tendencies. The disintegrating tendencies emanate from the internal dynamics of an institutional set-up, referred to above, both expressed in the incomplete regulation by the institutional rules of an interaction field, and in the incomplete correspondence between actor strategies and rules. But they also emanate from the need to change the rules when the situation changes. The perceived kind

⁴³ This way of formulating the tendency over time to further integration, may seem to have a certain similarity to, particularly, neo-functional integration theories, and, of course, there is a parallel in relation to the gradual acceptance of new institutions to the degree that they constitute an important given fact of the new interaction field. But we have not included any kind of expansional logic of 'spill-over' to the establishment of new regulatory regimes.

of regulation needed for an interaction field may change as societal problems and proposed solutions change over time, be they economic problems such as recession or unemployment or political problems in terms of political instability, the rise of political violence, or lack of legitimacy of the political system. Societal ideologies may change and new proposals for new institutional arrangements are brought into the economic and political discourse, criticizing the present institutions as inefficient or unjust. The integration processes may thus be seen as open-ended, coexisting with disintegrating processes, where there happens a division, a split up, of an interaction field into different subfields, defined by different institutions. The interplay between integration and disintegration processes is very complex. New patterns of interaction, be they formal or informal, are generated all the time, while some common institutions remain and regulate the characteristics of and links between the new organized interaction fields. Higher level rules or norms will regulate the institutions on a lower level. Thus, political rules often regulate the autonomy of an organization to restrict the access to that organization, in order to prohibit discriminatory practices. Higher level cultural norms will regulate acceptable links between individuals and (public) organizations expressed in client, customer or citizen roles.

Integration as social learning

Institutions as rule-sets include one other aspect which we have so far only touched upon very fleetingly, but which has been implicitly present in the emphasis on institutions as common or collective rules: they have to be learnt. The institutions of a society, being common to all participants of an interaction field, must be transmitted to the members, and accepted by them, for the institutional arrangement to fulfill the function of coordinating behaviour. A new participant in a social game must learn the rules of the game. What kind of game it is, who is entitled to participate, what actions are permitted or prescribed in different situations, what sanctions which are related to what breaches of the rules, all this must be learnt, and to some extent, be taught, to new participants. Many of the basic institutions of a society are initially taught through the educational system. In many school-systems you are taught the basics about the political system, its constitution, main institutions and procedures, while both understanding and basic values are developed through interaction with your peer-groups, through mass-media etc. Some more task-specific rule-sets, such as the rules of a bureaucracy, are learnt through a combination of teaching of official organization charts and job descriptions, and training. Some informal institutions, such as the informal cultural rules of the social life of a local community, must be almost entirely learnt through imitation and experience, as they are rarely explicitly formulated. It is important to stress that institutions are learnt through social interaction in the sense that the 'mental models'⁴⁴ of roles, rules and borders of a social field are developed through the interplay with other people, where a) the history of the action field, b) individual experience of what rules which actually regulate behaviour,

⁴⁴ Cf. p. 6 above.

and c) the influence of other people in communicating the 'rules of the action field', all have a significant part to play. Thus, knowledge, beliefs, and ideas about an institution are 'socially constructed'. As the rules of the action field are reproduced by the actions of the participants, the rule-set is possible to change, but only through social action, not individual. A sudden change in the action repertoire of one participant will most probably create uncertainty and suspicion and possibly resistance and sanctions from the other participants. In cases of hegemony or extreme power inequality, one might of course find an individual actor whose actions can be decisive in the social construction of an institution, in the sense that he can 'force' the other actors to adopt new rules for the field despite their reluctance to do so. 'Social construction' does not imply equality of influence.

It seems evident that, as we define integration as the establishment of common institutions for a certain interaction field, these institutional rule-sets will be learnt, internalized and accepted through processes which may be summarized as 'social learning' or the 'social construction' of an interaction field.

Thus, integration as social learning might be seen as a process through which the actors develop their knowledge and adjust their expectations of what actions and roles which are appropriate in the new, formally integrated, interaction field. As we have already discussed above, the introduction of new common institutions is sometimes a politically contested issue. This means that the social learning processes may reflect a power distribution in society. Social learning is not 'neutral' in relation to the values and interests of the participants and therefore strategies to influence and control the processes are to be expected. But through social learning people come to be integrated in the sense that they come to share beliefs and norms about an interaction field.

Social learning can also be seen as continuous process, where there is not only a learning in relation to the introduced institutions, but where the interaction patterns, established by the new institutional framework, support the generation of new experiences and new knowledge. The interaction field can thus be seen as knowledge-producing field, with new knowledge or innovations being the result of the present institutional set-up, but also potentially challenging that set-up and generating proposals for institutional change.

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